

Competitive grant program would fund college counseling center outreach and student treatment

□ WASHINGTON, DC (May 11, 2011) – Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today introduced legislation to address growing mental health needs on college campuses. The *Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act*, H.R. 1833 would establish grants to provide funding to colleges seeking to focus on outreach to identify students who may be contemplating suicide or have other mental health needs. The bill also assists colleges to provide treatment to students who come to counseling centers for help.

Colleges and universities nationwide are overwhelmed and lack necessary resources to respond to the need for awareness, screening, and services for students suffering from mental illness. Over 90 percent of counseling directors believe there is an increase in the number of students coming to campus with severe psychological problems despite limited resources. In addition, a 2010 American College Health Association (ACHA) survey of more than 95,000 college and university students revealed that 48 percent of students reported having felt overwhelming anxiety, 31 percent felt so depressed it was difficult to function, and 46 percent felt hopeless.

“We need to make sure that when we send our children off to college that we are taking every possible step to keep them healthy and safe. The evidence is clear that we do not have enough mental health counselors available to help students deal with stress, depression and other mental health crises, and the results can be tragic,” said Representative Schakowsky. “When students don’t have access to mental health services they may look to suicide, develop eating disorders, or turn to drugs as a solution. Increasing access to mental health care services on campus will provide students with the help they need, reduce dropout rates, and save lives.”.

Key Provisions in the Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act :

□

- **Grant Program:** The bill would establish a grant program within the Department of Health and Human Services to assist colleges and universities in providing direct mental health services and outreach to students, families, and staff to increase awareness of mental health issues. The funds may also be used to hire staff and expand mental health training opportunities.

- **Public Education Campaign:** The bill would call on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to create a public health awareness campaign around mental health and to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness for students. CDC would be required to seek input from national mental and behavioral health organizations and colleges and universities.

- **Federal Leadership:** The bill would establish an interagency working group on college mental health to discuss mental and behavioral health concerns and promote federal agency collaboration to support innovations in mental health services and supports for students on college and university campuses.

The Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act would ensure colleges have the resources needed to aid personnel and students at a vulnerable time in their development. The bill is supported by over 40 national organizations including American Counseling Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, Bazelon Center for

Mental Health Law, Mental Health America, National Association of Social Workers, and National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.

###